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ABSTRACT

School Based Decision Making (SBDM) was implemented in two secondary, two junior high, and three elementary schools in the Memphis City School System in Tennessee during the 1989-90 school year. The implementation process of that first year and the roles of the persons involved are discussed as well as the use of the Tennessee School Climate Inventory (TSCI) to monitor the effect of SBDM on the following dimensions of school climate: (1) order; (2) leadership; (3) environment; (4) involvement; (5) instruction; (6) expectations; and (7) collaboration. Twenty questions related to personnel relationships, student dimensions, school community relationships, the instructional program, and the school environment were added to the inventory, and staff were asked to rate 10 items related to the implementation of SBDM. Results are presented in two tables. (10 references) (CLA)

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Impact of School Based Decision Making on School Climate

Dennie L. Smith, Thomas C. Valesky & Dianne D. Horgan

School Based Decision Making (SBDM) was implemented in seven schools (two secondary, two junior high and three elementary) in the Memphis City School System during the 1989-90 school year. The Tennessee State Department of Education granted a three year waiver to modify the established rules and regulations for the operations of these schools. Site Councils were established to move the decision making process closer to the operational level to ensure increased accountability of these inner city schools and to experiment with new policy implications.

The first year (1989-90) of the SBDM Project was devoted to establishing the school site councils and to training faculty, staff, and councils concerning SBDM. Councils, composed of teachers, community representatives and the principal, were organized to make collective decisions to operate the respective schools. During this first year the Councils were involved in the process of interviewing and recommending prospective principals and teachers to the superintendent who made the final hiring decisions. In addition each school conducted a needs assessment and the Site Councils developed an action plan which included curriculum, personnel and budgetary matters. The action plans needed approval by the central administration for implementation during the 1990-91 school year. The Councils operated on a consensus basis in making decisions. The principal basically functioned as a facilitator in providing information and helping with the implementation of the Council's decisions. A more detailed description of site council formation, training and processes in this project is available through the Center for Research in Educational Policy (Etheridge, Hall, Brown, Lucas, 1990).

Currently, school based management is one of the most promising as well as the most active areas for policy experimentation, yet the research is highly descriptive and tentative (David, 1990; Prasch, 1990) or "either project descriptions, status reports or advocacy pieces" (Malen,

Ogawa, Kranz, 1990, p. 30). Based upon early research findings, it is anticipated that the establishment of SBDM in the various schools will increase teacher involvement and improve the overall school climate (Conley, 1990). As this project continues, we will have data on these issues.

Instrumentation

We are using the Tennessee School Climate Inventory (TSCI) Inventory to monitor the implementation of School-Based Decision Making in the seven schools (Butler, Alberg, McNelis, Pike, and Chandler (1990). This Inventory was developed in light of the extensive research conducted in the area of organizational culture and climate (e.g., Miner, 1988; Miskel & Ogawa, 1988). Validation efforts included a thorough review of the effective schools research to develop 49 questions that assessed the following subscales: Order, Leadership, Environment, Involvement, Instruction, Expectations and Collaboration. An elaboration of the respective subscale dimensions helps to define school climate as measured by the TSCI:

- **Order**: Extent to which the environment is ordered and appropriate student behaviors are present.
- **Leadership**: Extent to which the administration provides instructional leadership.
- **Environment**: Extent to which positive learning environments exist.
- **Involvement**: Extent to which parents and the community are involved in the school.
- **Instruction**: Extent to which the instructional program is developed and implemented.
- **Expectations**: Extent to which students are expected to learn and be responsible.
- **Collaboration**: Extent to which the administration, faculty, and students cooperate and participate in problem solving.

We are interested in how the school-based decision making experience relates to school climate. We therefore added questions exploring two general issues: school improvement and SBDM implementation. Twenty questions concerning school improvement focused on the following areas:

- **Faculty/Administrative/Staff Dimensions**: Faculty participation in decision making and cooperation between administration, faculty and staff.
- **Student Dimensions**: Students' attitude toward school as well as their involvement in decision making.
- **School/Community Relationships**: Parent and community involvement in the school and communication with the staff.
- **Instructional Program**: Expectations for student achievement along with the coordination of curriculum concerns between grade levels and diversity of teaching/learning styles.
- **School Environment**: Faculty and staff morale in the school.

The staff rated school improvement in these areas on a five point scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). Table 1 shows responses to these items. In general, staff feel their schools have a positive school climate and have a positive impression of SBDM.

Staff were also asked to rate 10 items on a five -point scale (from poor to excellent) concerning the *implementation* of SBDM. Items dealt with various factors within the SBDM project including leadership of the site council, community awareness of SBDM, technical support provided by central administration and the value of the school action plans. Table 2 shows these results. Again, staff report satisfaction with how SBDM is being implemented in their schools. It is interesting to note that the item with the highest degree of satisfaction is "value of SBDM." Clearly we are dealing with staff who are already enthusiastic and committed to shared decision making.

Table 1

Percentages of response for School Improvement scale

Item	Disagree		Agree
Faculty/Administration/Staff Dimensions			
Faculty participation in decision making	21	24	55
Leadership provided by administration	18	19	63
School-wide/grade level/department goals	5	19	76
Cooperation between administration & staff	15	24	61
Involvement of support staff in improvement	13	24	62
Student Dimension			
Student attitudes toward school	22	29	49
Student involvement in decision making	39	28	32
Student attendance	36	23	40
Student behavior	36	24	40
School/Community Dimensions			
Parent perceptions of school and programs	21	34	45
Parent/community involvement in school	28	31	41
Communications with parent/commun grps	18	31	52
Instructional Program			
Provisions for diversity of teach/learn styles	7	24	69
Curriculum coordination/levels & courses	11	21	68
Expectations for student achievement	9	14	77
School Environment			
General faculty & staff morale	26	24	50
Overall climate for teaching & learning	18	24	58
Physical environment of school	31	23	46
Management of school, programs & services	15	25	60
Social/emotional support for students & staff	21	18	61

Table 2

Percentages of responses for SBDM improvement scale

Item	Poor		Excellent
Coordination provided by school council	21	18	61
School-based staff development activities	16	24	60
SBDM implementation throughout school	29	22	49
School-wide awareness of SBDM	13	17	70
Continued emphasis on SBDM through year	18	18	64
Community awareness of SBDM	20	22	43
Support & services provided by central office	23	19	58
Data & reports provided to the school	20	18	62
Use of SBDM data to plan school improvements	16	24	60
Value of school improvement plans	11	21	68
Value of SBDM	10	15	75

Summary

The planning and preparation during this first year was characterized by extensive involvement of all parties impacted by the effort to implement SBDM. Most of the teachers and administrators had the opportunity to freely participate in this innovation and were not coerced through bureaucratic systems for implementing a change effort. The initial assessment concerning the teachers, administrators and parents indicated that a positive climate had been established in the implementation of School Based Decision Making. The very fact that teachers, parents and the community were successfully involved in SBDM seems to have impacted the school climate in a very positive manner.

Research has generally supported a predictable pattern with any innovation, i. e., a period in which the change itself has a positive impact on the attitudes and interactions on the players (Hawthorne effect), generally followed by a decrease in this effect (Mayo, 1933). Thus because this innovation is still in its relative infant stages, it is much too early to predict the long term effects of SBDM. The success of SBDM will need to be monitored and evaluated extensively over the next few years to determine whether or not the various levels of involvement impact policy development and in the long run, increase the effectiveness of the total

school program. At subsequent meetings we look forward to presenting results based on our SBDM experiences in Memphis.

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